

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 130028
ORIGIN NEA-11

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R 222205Z MAY 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 130028

STADIS////////////////////
FOR CHARGE FROM NEA/ARN HOWELL

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1 AND 4

TAGS: SHUM

SUBJECT: IMPRISONMENT OF DR. HANNA IBRAHIM MIKHAIL

REF: (A) DAMASCUS 2339, (B) DAMASCUS 1918

1. WE ARE ALSO INTRIGUED BY RE-EMERGENCE OF REPORTS THAT HANNA MIKHAIL IS ALIVE AND BEING HELD IN SYRIAN PRISON. WE HAVE REVIEWED FILE ON MATTER FOR LATE 1976/EARLY 1977 AND NOTE THAT SIMILAR RUMORS WERE CIRCULATING AT THAT TIME, BUT WERE NOT GIVEN CREDENCE BECAUSE OF MORE IMPRES-SIVE EVIDENCE THAT MIKHAIL HAD BEEN KILLED IN LEBANON. LAST HOLDING IN OUR FILES IS FROM FEBRUARY 1977 WHEN WE INFORMED MIKHAIL'S SISTER, MRS. JOYCE HANNA THAT ICRC HEADQUARTERS IN GENEVA WAS UNABLE TO PROVIDE A DEFINITIVE CONCLUSION RE MIKHAIL'S FATE.

2. WE ARE NOT ADVERSE TO FOLLOWING UP PLANNED ICRC
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APPROACH TO SARG ON MATTER IN AN APPROPRIATE MANNER. WE PRESUME ICRC REPRESENTATIVE IN DAMASCUS WILL INFORM YOU WHEN THIS ACTION IS TAKEN. ICRC GENERALLY HAS BEEN OUT IN FRONT IN INVESTIGATING MIKHAIL CASE AND WE BELIEVE THIS REMAINS MOST EFFECTIVE STRATEGY. IN VIEW, HOWEVER, OF ICRC DAMASCUS REPRESENTATIVE'S REPEATED REQUEST FOR

ANONYMITY, WE WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR VIEWS ON
WHETHER, IN MAKING OUR APPROACH, WE SHOULD INDICATE
AWARENESS OF ICRC ACTION?

3. WE WOULD ALSO LIKE YOUR APPRAISAL OF THE APPROPRIATE
SARG OFFICIAL WITH WHOM YOU MIGHT BROACH SUBJECT OF
MIKHAIL. WE AGREE THAT, GIVEN INTEREST OF AMCIT RELATIVES
OF MIKHAIL AND OUR EARLIER EFFORTS ON THEIR BEHALF,
EMBASSY HAS GOOD BASIS FOR FURTHER INQUIRIES RE WHERE-
ABOUTS AND WELFARE OF MIKHAIL. ONE ASPECT OF CASE WHICH
INTRIGUES US, ASSUMING RECENT REPORTS ARE TRUE, IS WHY
SYRIANS WOULD STILL BE HOLDING MIKHAIL IN VIEW OF IMPROVED
RELATIONS WITH PLO AND REPORTS OF RELEASE OF PALESTINIAN
DETAINEES FROM ERA OF LEBANESE STRIFE. WE WOULD BE GRATE-
FUL FOR YOUR BEST ASSESSMENT OF WHETHER THIS MAY BE ATTRI-
BUTABLE TO POTENTIAL EMBARRASSMENT IN FACE OF WIDESPREAD
INTEREST IN CASE. DO YOU BELIEVE, IN OTHER WORDS, THAT
USG APPROACH COULD INCREASE PRESSURES ON SARG TO CONCEAL
MIKHAIL IMPRISONMENT?

4. WE HAVE HAD NO RPT NO FURTHER INQUIRY AS YET FROM
MRS. HANNA OR CONGRESSMAN LENT. OUR FILES INDICATE THAT
WE HAVE NOT PREVIOUSLY APPROACHED SARG DIRECTLY IN MIKHAIL
CASE. WHEN WE HAVE RECEIVED YOUR SUGGESTIONS RE STRATEGY,
WE ARE PREPARED TO CONSIDER INSTRUCTING YOU TO RAISE
MATTER IN HOPES OF DETERMINING WHETHER LATEST REPORTS ARE
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ACCURATE. VANCE

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